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## Training Programs – Training and Development Alternatives for Students

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### Abstract

Training programs have been established as a form of training for adults, being generally used within companies' personal development alternatives starting from the employees' performance assessment processes. The current century requires a different way of approaching academic education, starting from the employers' observation in reference to the lack of the graduates' key competencies in the hiring process. We intend to demonstrate that it is useful to introduce training programs as an alternative form of education in academia, as well as in the high school environment.

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### 1. Introduction

This article aims to demonstrate that academic education is compatible with the training system characteristic to companies because it emphasizes the needs imposed by the real markets.

The classical education system is perceived as being conservative in the sense in which the pace of change is extremely slow, and such is explained to some extent, because tradition is one of the most powerful business card in many universities worldwide. This apparent advantage can become a burden given the fact we live in a world "after midnight" (Eddie, 2012) which means that due to the increasing of the level of complexity of the world we live in,

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the increasing of the speed with which things change, the ability to learn based on past experience, which remains relatively constant over time, it can no longer cope with this pace, causing problems when realities change beyond expectations in the contexts in which graduates will work. From this point of view, it is obvious that the professional practice within the business environment and the theory taught in universities may become incompatible should no educational compatibility measures are taken.

## 2. Theoretical perspectives on training

In today's world which is continuously changing, leaps are exponential and gaps may become impossible to recover.

It is obvious that theoretical knowledge is essential but training arises as an alternative to the academic education that gives students the opportunity to acquire the necessary competencies for the time when they will develop themselves within the business environment.

The short duration of trainings, the various teaching techniques used, demonstrate that this type of programs can be a valuable alternative to the classical education. Malcolm Knowles, an expert in learning theory introduced a term that describes graphically how adults learn (Knowles, 1995): andragogy (andragogy means "leading the adult"). From this perspective education means: independence doubled by common experiences, the relevance of things learned, the training synchronous with the changes faced by young people, the need for accuracy, learning from the trainer but also from other participants, adult-adult relationships, defining one's own needs for training, abandoning old ideas and reconsidering the current beliefs, using the trainer as a catalyst, mediator, facilitator, processor and sometimes expert, using the students' previous experience and illustrating ideas through examples provided by students, using analogies and comparisons, focusing on specific problems and issues (Kelly, 1975). Accelerating the pace of technology development, the speed with which modern society is evolving result in the need of growing up for the youth from the current generations. This reality requires young individuals to have an early connection with the business environment thus creating the conditions to approach from other perspectives. Moreover, one can observe that most of the young individuals do no longer have the necessary motivation to acquire information and gain competencies through traditional educational techniques.

From the view of this article's objectives, Sugata Mitra's statement, the author of a major educational project that is being implemented in India "Hall in the wall" is suggestive in terms of informatics knowledge, which highlight significantly the role of the trainer as facilitator "The acquisition of basic computing skills by any set of children can be achieved through incidental learning provided the learners are given access to a suitable computing facility, with entertaining and motivating content and some minimal (human) guidance" (Mitra, 2013).

The content elements provided by training may be included into three sub-categories: the sub-category that defines the factual content, the sub-category that defines the procedural content and the sub-category that defines the conceptual character. This classification is presented by Robert H. Vaughn in his book *The Professional Trainer: a Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Delivering and Evaluating Training Programs* (Vaughn 2008). In terms of classification, the factual content analyses pure data and information, the procedural content provides detailed information on how to proceed in certain situations, while the conceptual content includes information that answer the "why" and "how" questions in reference to the types of content of educational programs. At the same time, the aforementioned author shows the differences between the academic training and the organizational training. Such differences aim at: the teacher's or the trainer's credentials, the course content, the study objective levels, the time basis, the grading system, the common presentation style, the students' reason for participating in such training programs, the student unit, the training materials. The analysis of such differences shows that the organizational training is focused and application oriented, dealing mostly with facts and procedures and only rarely with concepts. In conducting trainings we need to keep in mind the following: the identification of training needs, the planning of training solutions, the design of training events, the delivery of training, incorporating new technologies into the training process, the transfer of learning, the evaluation of training, the management and marketing of the training activities, the continuing professional development of the training practitioners (Simmonds, 2008).

Given the fact that there are specific needs at the organizations' level, they can be solved through training. The analysis of the training needs requires reaching an agreement in reference to the training solutions.

### 3. Academic realities on the use of training

The practical component of this paper aims to highlight three successful experiments within the Faculty of Administration and Business, University of Bucharest: SPHER-AA, CSOL-UB and the partnerships network with high schools in the country, as well as the TEAMWORK experiment conducted in the University of Bucharest with the participation of students from most faculties therein. Thus we demonstrate the importance of a vision that offers the possibility of developing a unitary educational strategy at the University level.

From this perspective, at the level of the entities presented in the paper (Team Work, CSOL-UB, Faculty of Administration and Business - FAB) a process to identify and analyze the training needs has developed. In order to define the needs of the students involved in organizational activities the following information have been obtained: the types of skills currently owned by the roles and tasks performed by students, the assessment of the future position they will occupy within the two student organizations or the economic environment, their future roles and tasks, the training programs that will be needed, time frame allotted to training. For the development of advanced training programs we have considered: the individual capacity, each individual's motivation, the leadership, the organizational climate and team effectiveness.

There is no doubt that the results of the studies we conducted were illuminating in reference to the training needs. The SWOT analysis carried out at the level of these three systems (Team Work, CSOL-UB and FAB) revealed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for each of them. Based on the analysis of strengths and opportunities, we have established a strategy for training students in future years so that they can respond to the requirements imposed by these three entities, but also the economic environment in which they will evolve. The stakeholder analysis showed that in the economic environment there are actors whose priorities within their relationships with Team Work, CSOL-UB and FAB is to identify students who, during their academic period, have completed extracurricular activities by participating in internships, volunteering, summer schools, trainings, part-time jobs and, who are therefore attractive targets for employment.

Centre for Organizational Strategy and Leadership (CSOL-UB) is an institutional structure within the University of Bucharest (UB) which aims to create and develop: training and consultancy programs within organizational and leadership strategies, research on organizational and leadership strategies, collaboration with similar organizations from academia and business environment, events specific to organizational and leadership strategies with the participation of personalities from various environments (academic, business, political, social, cultural, etc.).

Also, CSOL-UB intends to support the development process of the interaction between the academic and business environment in order to optimize the leading methods of the organizations. Training programs are designed within the Training and Consultancy Department which are useful for the following environments: high school, academic and business. Based on a questionnaire, a research is provided so that to establish the training needs. This questionnaire applies to the high schools partners, the faculties of the University of Bucharest and the companies the Faculty of Administration and Business cooperates with within Business Consultancy Master's programs (in Romanian and English). Following the analysis of the questionnaires the necessity of the training programs was established for these three environments studied. We noticed that there are trainings which are especially requested at the level of those three environments: communication, non-verbal communication, diction and elocution, project management, negotiation. Based on these observations, we established the team of trainers comprising of: consultants, businessmen, teachers, students. Past experiences have shown us that certain techniques should be applied in training, techniques that take into account interactivity and presentation of case studies. The process of selecting trainers considered their business experience, their theoretical knowledge, charisma, ability to work interactively. The educational system SPHER-AA was designed to enhance the Total Education component education and this system aims to support the extracurricular component. From the perspective of the initiators of the SPHERE-AA concept: "creativity is a mental and social process involving the generation of new ideas or concepts, or new associations of the creative mind between existing ideas or concepts. The scene is the factor that stirs our creativeness, the space where animosities and other disturbing factors disappear, and the place where creativity is a synonym for art." Within this concept, a media communication course for the business environment was created developing necessary competencies for networking with various environments where youth evolves.

Within CSOL-UB we are considering to apply the basic theory of “action learning” that allows students to learn from experience, to accept colleagues’ criticism and advice, to share their experiences with others, to explore together with colleagues the application method of learning through action and to draw conclusions.

Within CSOL-UB we seek to develop consultancy and individual counseling activities so that trainers will become veritable resources providing information, defining and solving current problems and applying knowledge in real environments in time and space. According to Howard Rheingold (Rheingold, 1991), it is obvious that through training we can speak of the process of creating future realities based on some current possibilities (the virtual reality).

Team Work Association is an NGO focused on project management which aims to facilitate students’ accumulation through volunteer activities of experience necessary for an effective inclusion on the labor market. In order to contribute both to the young students’ professional and personal development, Team Work provides an environment where values such as professionalism, teamwork and volunteering guide all activities. During its ten years of existence, the Team Work Association organized training programs that took into account its members’ needs, but also the needs of the other students of the twenty faculties of the University. During its eleven years of existence, Team Work organized summer schools on various topics (for instance, communication, project management, negotiation, organizational behavior, career management). Such subjects represented various experiences in the training business where experts from various domains were involved. These summer schools formed trainers among students that had valuable qualities and skills in such domains. The various experiments within Team Work have created conditions favorable to the development of team spirit and competencies required in the business environment. One edition of the summer school aimed to demonstrate the advantages of information exchange in intercultural environments. This edition of summer school was attended by students from Romania, Moldova, Japan, Vietnam, and Mexico. Each participant was trainer for his colleagues from the summer school. Personal development was the theme of this edition. Students had the opportunity to compare different visions of personal development from the perspective of several national cultures.

Within the Faculty of Administration and Business a project was developed having as objectives the conclusion of partnerships with high schools in Romania. Thus, 20 partnerships were concluded with high schools in Romania and their graduates are candidates for admission to the Faculty of Administration and Business, University of Bucharest (specializations: Business Administration, Public Administration and Marketing). The Faculty of Administration and Business have created proper conditions to organize workshops and trainings in high schools. The starting point for creating the project on partnerships with high schools in Romania was the experience we had with Business Consultancy Master’s programs (in Romanian and English) regarding the quality of work in project teams. Within the two masters each academic year is divided into 8-10 project teams, each team with 5-6 members and a manager / coordinator. Thus, we want to cultivate among students a more open, constructive and performance-oriented attitude, through a program that encourages initiative among students. Students’ appraisal is performed starting from the individual contribution and analyzing each individual’s contribution at the level of the team they evolve in. Teachers and advisors wish to share their knowledge in the field through case studies that are showing current realities and are linking students to the labor market. Thus, depending on the needs of each group of students, they identify the domains that require special attention. Experts from the business environment are permanently invited as lectors who contribute to increase the value of the course and facilitate the students’ acquiring process of necessary information. If until now the concept of networking was barely used in academia, by developing these master programs we have demonstrated how useful a communication network is to connect students, teachers, business consultants and practitioners who aim to implement a high level of excellence on the Romanian market. Conditions are created within this network for developing trainings on topics set by students, teachers and consultants who can become contributors. This type of network will be created for the project on partnerships with high schools in Romania as well. In addition to teachers and consultants, businessmen and students from the Business Consultancy programs will also be involved within the trainings that will be developed in high schools.

Starting from the analysis conducted by Charles Margerison (Margerison, 1999) we are trying to direct the training programs within CSOL-UB and Team Work towards shifting from: classical training to action-based training, the activity of providing information to the activity of providing knowledge, analytical programs to

contracts, individual to group, standard cases to real cases, delegation to development, inputs to outcomes, time limited education to the permanent learning, experience based training to training based on real life.

Howard Gardner's book - *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (Gardner, 2006) where the originating sets of intelligence are defined: musical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, linguistic intelligence, spatial intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal and existential intelligence, has opened for us unexpected for developing the educational concept SPHERE-AA (presented above) where the knowledge indicated in Gardner's model may be gathered like in a cluster of knowledge. In fact, Gardner mentions "my guess is that the best educational interventions will continue to come from ingenious educators using simple materials and their wits."

Gardner's definition of understanding in his book *The unschooled mind. How children think and how schools should teach* (Gardner 1991) is remarkable and it argues that: "an individual understands whenever he or she is able to apply knowledge, concepts, or skills acquired in some kind of educational setting to a new instance or situation in which that knowledge is relevant."

The purpose of the experiments within CSOL-UB, Team Work, SPHERE-AA, Project on partnerships with high schools, the FAB, is precisely to make students able to apply permanent accumulation in contexts created by them or created by others for them.

The training methods that we experienced were the following: short trainings offered by the colleges with competencies in the fields of interest, role play exercises, skill development exercises, delegating tasks to: Team Work, CSOL-UB, SPHERE-AA, Project on partnerships with high schools, the FAB, directed projects / action based learning, group discussions, study groups, counseling, coaching provided by more experienced colleagues, mentoring, teamwork, accountability for some areas of responsibility, research through action.

We learned that training programs should not only be efficient, but must also be effective, and this is the reason why one should set a priority order, a detailed action plan. In developing the training system we are implementing within CSOL-UB, Team Work, SPHERE AA, partnerships with high schools, counseling programs in Romanian and English at the Faculty of Administration and Business we intend to answer the following questions "Who?", "Why?", "What?", "Where?", "When?", "Which?", "How?" and "How much?" (Simmonds, 2008).

From the perspective of the first question, to define the training groups we start from the analysis of students' current level of knowledge, competencies and attitudes, as well as their past experiences. Also, we consider here their development plans, as well as their learning styles. According to the learning styles model proposed by David Kolb, there are four styles, each with its specific features: the converging style (learning through abstract conceptualization and active experimentation), the diverging style (combination of concrete experience and reflective observation), the assimilating style (abstract conceptualization and reflective observation), the accommodating style (concrete experience and active experimentation) (Kolb, 1991). Taking into account these differences the trainer must include within the course models to suit every style, thus having the certainty that he will get the attention of all the participants. At the same time, we also consider creating some optimal groups in terms of number and education. The experience we gained with the groups from the Business Consultancy Master's programs has shown us that the optimal number of participants is maximum twelve.

The second question emphasizes the learning objectives, the purpose of training programs, the targeted behavior, and improving performance. Thus, the learning objectives must be synchronous with the team's and organization's plans where the training is conducted. The definition of behavioral objectives envisages cognitive domains (knowledge - the development of intellectual skills), psychomotor (skills) and affective (attitudes).

The third question concerns the different levels of "what to be done", "what should be done" and "what could be done." In designing a training scheme, "must" means achieving basic competencies that are required in accomplishing tasks and increasing knowledge to build capacity and skills, "should" represents the elements that would be useful to be included should time permit this and students have the ability and motivation to acquire them and should the team work very well, "could" is represented by additional elements such as abstracts, distance learning, Internet, blended learning.

The fourth question requires finding solutions at the training location, since there are big differences between different training environments (location, technical equipment, etc.). Choosing the training locations envisaged the period when such trainings took place. The summer schools within Team Work were held at Sinca Veche in Brasov County, Cumpatu-Sinai. The trainings organized by CSOL-UB are conducted in seminar rooms, at applicant



companies' headquarters or at the premises of high schools partners (only in the case of partnerships with high schools in Romania). Experience has shown that learning should be distributed so that students are given facilities to increase the level of knowledge, to improve their competencies and capabilities regardless their location (home, university, on the street, in a company, etc.). E-learning or internet, satellite broadcast programs, distributed learning systems, mobile phones, electronic agendas, CD-ROM or DVD are becoming realities of a global learning network.

From the temporal perspective, the fifth question concerns the moment when learning takes place, every individual having a favorable time of day when the process of acquiring knowledge is very fast and this is why the trainer should plan the practical activities in relation to these realities. Besides the day periods, in training programs periods of the week, season or year are also important because time is generally of utmost importance in structuring the learning process.

Reality has shown that it is necessary to have a learning strategy to meet the requirements of groups during their various training periods. The strategy can determine whether the training is done individually or in groups and whether there is the possibility for learners to choose their training periods. The participatory learning methods represented and are still representing within the analyzed systems (CSOL-UB, Team Work), effective forms of acquiring information and development of competencies. We are hereby mentioning some of the participatory learning methods that we used within our training programs: applied projects, brainstorming, computer training, public lecture, demonstration, experiential reading, inviting an expert. In carrying out these trainings, an important component is represented by the costs; given the fact that within the academic environments financial resources are limited we conducted trainings by involving teachers and students in this type of partnerships thus minimizing the necessary financial resources. We can actually speak of relationships systems, networking, and the enhancement of some competencies networks that exist and are willing to facilitate trainings to the extent that the objectives are clear and the results of such trainings may result in the students' eventual hiring within companies represented by the trainers. We can actually speak of a recruitment and selection process along with training programs. These training programs are finalized with assessments carried out by the trainers, but the results are often noticeable in very long periods of time, only after students get a job and the competencies gained as a result of the training programs prove useful in their activities. Appraisals become forms of assessing the students' knowledge accumulation and they are means to determine which future training programs are needed.

The learning activity took into account individual projects, group projects, workshops, personal learning plans. Self-development and self-assessment are becoming essential for all the students and this is the reason why trainers must provide them with models of practice and behavior. The relationship between assessment and self-assessment defines the distance between reality and perception and suggest ways to: improve knowledge, increase competencies and labor market integration of young people.

The analysis carried out within this paper demonstrates the need to use a mix of educational components so that the relationship between high school and college on the one hand, and between faculty and the economic environment on the other hand, to allow young people to have a rapid adjustment to the new contexts where they evolve.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The evolution of society will force people to adapt to new and sometimes unexpected circumstances. Based on this assumption education will have to become permanent and the external factors will force us both at an organizational and personal level to act in accordance with the constraints of the environment. Innovative technologies have already led us in the world of eLearning and decisions have to be taken in real-time. In this circumstances training becomes an invaluable way of accumulating information, of knowledge and of guidance towards action. Complex challenges force universities to adapt to the realities of the world we currently live in, because in the fight between supply to demand, it is not enough to just understand the demand, but one has to also shape it. That's why training will have to become an essential addition to modern education along with internships, workshops, virtual companies and networks.

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